

Appendix F - Annex C (i)

Cheshire East Council Budget Consultation 2009-10 **People and Places Event – 14th January 2009**

Minutes of Discussion Group 1 – Social Care Services

Facilitator:	John Weeks	Strategic Director (People)
Co-Facilitator:	Ceri Harrison Paul Goodwin	Head of Transformation

John described the Council's Social Care Services and related budget issues:

Children and Family Services

- Schools are funded from Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), a ring-fenced grant allocated from Government
 - Some schools have built up balances – the formation of “clusters” of schools is an initiative aimed at driving up standards and encouraging improved engagement with communities
 - Cheshire East has a role in shaping the development of schools and use of DSG, including its use in supporting children's and family services
- Social care for children is a high profile service and has a number of issues and challenges
 - Cheshire East will inherit a substantial budget overspend, due to the demand for services for “looked-after” children
 - Foster carers are moving on and new carers are difficult to recruit (a question was asked on the funding of private sector fostering agencies and the associated problems of retention and resources were noted)
- An Interim Head of Children's Services has been appointed
 - Barbara Hughes will review services and take a radical look at improving quality and addressing budget pressures

Adult Services

- There are considerable budget savings to be made
- The solution is largely in the Redesign of Adult Social Care Services, eliminating waste and simplifying processes; there is a clear vision:

- Personalisation – allowing greater choice and control for customers on how their care funds are spent
- Lean systems – ensuring every process adds value to the service outcome (e.g. significantly reducing steps in assessment process)
- Local working – Ensuring local teams are aligned to be more responsive to people’s needs
- Rationalising management structures – notably in respect of provider services

Question: Questions were asked on the “corporate parent” role of local Councillors with regard to Looked-After children and the plans for changing the way we care for them and improve their educational attainment.

Response: It was noted that all Councillors are “corporate parents”, each having the responsibility of being a champion for every Looked-After child. Training for Councillors, to acquaint them with their new role would be important. Reference was made to Frank Dobson’s letter to all Councillors, setting out the Government’s expectations of their role, in relation to the care and welfare of children. Reference was also made to the Government’s “Narrowing the Gap” initiative, in respect of improving the educational attainment of disadvantaged pupils relative to others in the community. It was noted that despite efforts the gap had not narrowed significantly so far and that targeted approaches in schools would aim to add value (as incorporated within Local Area Agreement).

Question: Questions were asked on working in partnership, with voluntary sector groups (e.g. those supporting people with disabilities) and with the Police service.

It was noted that the Police service has an interest in prevention, education and safeguarding policies and is keen to be a partner in children’s social care.

Response: It was mentioned that a Children’s Trust for Cheshire East would be set up to manage partnership working and deliver the “Every Child Matters” objectives. Based on past experience, it was noted that to be effective the Trust would need to be a relatively small and tight body, with a focus upon strategic commissioning.

Question: Could an independent advocacy service be developed for Looked-After children?

Response: It was noted that training of Councillors was important and agreed that more should be done in this regard, beyond the role of Councillors. Comment was made that perhaps the “Every Child Matters” agenda should have a 6th outcome of dignity and respect, as with older people’s services.

Question: Questions were asked about the re-design of Adult social care services, working with partners, home care and community support centres.

Response: The need to take a fresh look at adult social care was explained, particularly in respect of capital investment in facilities. With the population aged 85+ set to increase by over 40% by 2016, this could bring a significant rise in the incidence of dementia. The future of Community Support Centres (CSCs) needs to be addressed, with options including the decommissioning and disposal of assets, joint commissioning with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) of new facilities and a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme for additional extra care housing.

It was noted that Direct Payments provided individuals with money to buy the care services to meet their particular needs and that a Resource Allocation System is being developed and tested to work out entitlements; there will be assistance to help people manage this arrangement, but they do not have to take advantage of it if they find it difficult.

Question: Will the Direct Payments allocation system be a Cheshire East scheme or a pan-county scheme?

Response: The scheme has been developed in conjunction with Cheshire West & Chester, but each Authority is responsible for its own scheme and consequently it is possible that they could be different. It was noted that there are national targets and a legislative framework for Direct Payments so some aspects are non negotiable.

Question: A question was asked on the Personalisation agenda and the resourcing of support mechanisms to help people take advantage of the choices appropriate to them.

Response: It was recognised that older people, particularly those suffering from dementia, would need such assistance. It was also noted that whilst Local Authorities deal with critical cases, other agencies support those close to being critical and that investment in prevention and re-ablement, would be important and is being designed into the new model.

Question: Will the ring-fencing of Carers' Grant continue?

Response: There are no plans to change this – carers have a critical role. It was noted though that some £21m in Government funding will be classed as Area Based Grant and consequently Cheshire East will need to work within the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) to agree a strategy in relation to use of the money.

Question: How do you plan to reconcile the Transforming Learning Communities (TLC) agenda with maintaining/ building community focus?

Reference was made to Authorities being penalised for carrying excessive surplus places, but also that loss of schools, notably smaller schools in rural areas, would have an adverse effect on resources in local communities.

Response: TLC projects already underway would be completed. In other areas there will be a need to look at all the facts and be as clear as possible on the various aspects; the People Advisory Panel through a Task and Finish Group would be taking a fresh look at the TLC programme, including changes in demand in the current economic climate.

Comment was made on the importance of schools embracing the opportunity to engage and play a full part as community resources.

Question: A question was asked on advocacy services for those struggling to help find somewhere to live for people with dementia and learning disabilities.

Response: Early detection and preventive measures were also recognised as important. It will be important for Cheshire East to develop a strategy for joint commissioning to manage the demand, in partnership with providers.

Question: A question was asked on funding and the commissioning of preventive services in relation to children's social care.

Response: The Children's Trust needs to get up and running. Regarding child protection, the first point of contact is often the Council; a challenge for the Children's Trust will be to stimulate other players in the system to respond more fully to lower level demand.

Question: What's happening to the Schools psychology service and performance on statementing?

Response: The vision is that educational psychologists help and support teachers and parents more and that multi-disciplinary teams are created.